DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 902 FL 018 237

AUTHOR Hulsman, Paul; Edelenbos, Peter
TITLE The Achievement Level for English in Dutch Primary Schools.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Communicative Competence (Languages); Comparative Analysis; Elementary Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Grade 8; Grammar; *Instructional Effectiveness; Language Proficiency; Language Tests; Scores; Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods; Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS *Netherlands

ABSTRACT

A study examined the differences in the way teachers use grammar-based courses and communicative courses of English language instruction in Dutch primary schools, and the differences in the achievement levels of children taught by the various methods. Eight standard curricula commonly used in Dutch schools and using either communicative or grammar-based approaches or a combination of the two were included in the investigation. For each curriculum, the classroom techniques, themes, and topics were compared and a score reflecting the degree of communicative approach used was calculated. Student achievement levels on proficiency tests in listening, reading, writing, and speaking based on the content of the eight courses were compared. Results suggest that it does not make much difference which curriculum is used for English instruction at the primary level, but that the amount of time spent on English does matter. Teacher proficiency and experience are also seen as significant factors in student achievement. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

RION
P.O. Box 1286
9701 BG Groningen
The Netherlands

ED312902

THE ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL FOR ENGLISH IN DUTCH PRIMARY SCHOOLS[1]

Paul Hulsman & Peter Edelenbos

The introduction of English as an obligatory subject in Dutch primary education is a recent development. It was only introduced as such in 1986. The study which is the subject of this talk is the first large-scale investigation of this new subject. The aim of the study is to investigate differences in the way teachers use, on the one hand, grammar-based courses and, on the other hand, communicative courses, and the differences in achievement level of children who were taught English with the two types of courses. For a good understanding of the results, it will be necessary to discuss to some length the nature of the research itself and the developments leading up to it.

In the not too distant past the Netherlands, as for example the U.K., had a kind of 'eleven-plus' exam. The 'better' pupils of primary schools, i.e. those who were supposed to move up to grammar school, were taught French in their spare time, to prepare them for the regular education in that language in secondary school. However, the results of these preparatory lessons were on the whole disappointing, and there was a growing feeling that they were obsolete, so they gradually disappeared in the sixties.

1 The research was possible by subsidy from the Dutch Institute of Educational Research in The Hague

FL018237

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Hulsman, P.
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

In 1970, the preliminary version of a new act on Dutch primary education was published. It proposed to include English as a new obligatory subject in the curriculum. In various places projects were started to prepare for this event. The development of English in primary education was much boosted when the National Institute for Curriculum Development, the SLO, began to take part. This institute was to become one of the driving forces behind the development of English as a primary school subject.

In 1981 the Primary Education Act was passed, which provided that in 1986 English was to become an obligatory subject in the primary school curriculum for the two highest grades. From 1981 onwards more and more schools started to include English in their timetables, until in 1985 more than 55 per cent of primary schools taught English in one form or another. At the same time, designers and publishers of course materials began to design courses for English in primary education.

One of these course designers was the SLO, the National Institute for Curriculum Development. They did more than that, however. For example, they formulated a set of six goals for English in primary education, which was generally adopted by those working in that field. They also designed a multi-media course for the in-service training of primary school teachers. This was necessary because it had been decided that no extra teachers would become available for teaching English. This should be done by members of the existing school teams, the vast majority of whom have no qualifications for the teaching of English. Although the course was not obligatory it was a success: around 15,000 teachers took part in it. There are some 8,000 primary schools in the Netherlands, so on average two teachers of each school participated in this in-service training.

The SLO based all its work, which involved years of effort and a large amount of money, on the communicative approach to language teaching. They naturally wanted to know what the effects of this approach are, compared with the effects of the more traditional, grammatical approach. They therefore commissioned a research project, to be conducted by RION, an institute for educational research in Groningen.

This project ran from January 1986 to January 1988, and involved 112 primary schools and around 2,100 pupils, all in grade 8, the highest grade in primary school. They were tested with the same instruments twice. All results presented here were obtained in the second round of testing.

Anyone who is a linguist or a language teacher has a more or less specific notion of what the two approaches mentioned entail. However, there is no generally accepted unified definition of either. From the mid-seventees onwards several publications appeared (among them Wilkins, 1977; Widdowson, 1978; Brumfit and Johnson, 1979, Johnson, 1979; Johnson and Porter, 1983) in which ideas about language teaching were developed which were soon summarized under the heading of the 'communicative approach.' Usually these ideas were contrasted with the traditional practice in language teaching: the 'structural-grammatical approach.' For the sake of convenience I will refer to the latter as 'the grammatical approach'.

Basing your research on the concept of 'approach' poses a problem. The problem is that in the day-to-day practice of teaching and learning a language 'approaches' as such do not exist. They are theoretical constructs. To a certain extent, the designers of course materials may adopt such a construct as a guiding principle for their work. In other words, courses for English in primary education reflect the choices made by their designers, and by studying them one may determine to what extent they represent a certain approach. Besides, courses materials for English are used in 97 per cent of Dutch primary schools. As the vast majority of primary school teachers has no qualifications for teaching English they are, to a very large extent, dependent on these course materials.

We therefore decided to take the available course materials as a starting point for our investigation and finally included eight courses in our research. In Table .1 you find their names, the approach they represent and what we call their 'approach score'.

Table 1. Approach Scores for 8 courses for English in Primary Education

Courses	Score
Communicative approach	
No Problem	430
Engels Basisonderwijs	379
Units	348
Mixed approach	
Real English	312
Junior Contact	262
Ticket to Britain	243
Grammatical approach	
Now for English	172
Ready Steady Go!	151
Mean	287.4

In September 1986, these eight courses were used in 88 per cent of Dutch primary schools, with a large majority opting for communicative courses and only very few using grammatical ones.

The 'approach score' is our solution to the problem of assigning the courses to one of the approaches. On the basis of the relevant literature we discerned six areas where the courses should differ if they were either communicative or grammatical. These areas are:

- the importance and the treatment of grammatical structures;
- the organization of the subject matter;
- the structure of the lessons;
- the type of excercises;
- the tolerance towards errors when using the language;
- the vocabulary.

On the basis of these criteria we designed a scale containing 23 statements, such as:

- pupils are confronted with authentic language situations;
- the goals of the course stress the communicative skills of pupils;
- the correct use of rules is seen as essential for the use of a foreign language;
- in the first phase of each lesson the stress is on the introduction and/or practicing of a grammatical structure;
- grammatical structures are only presented if they are necessary for better communication;
- the course has a thematic structure, i.e. several lessons revolve around a certain theme.

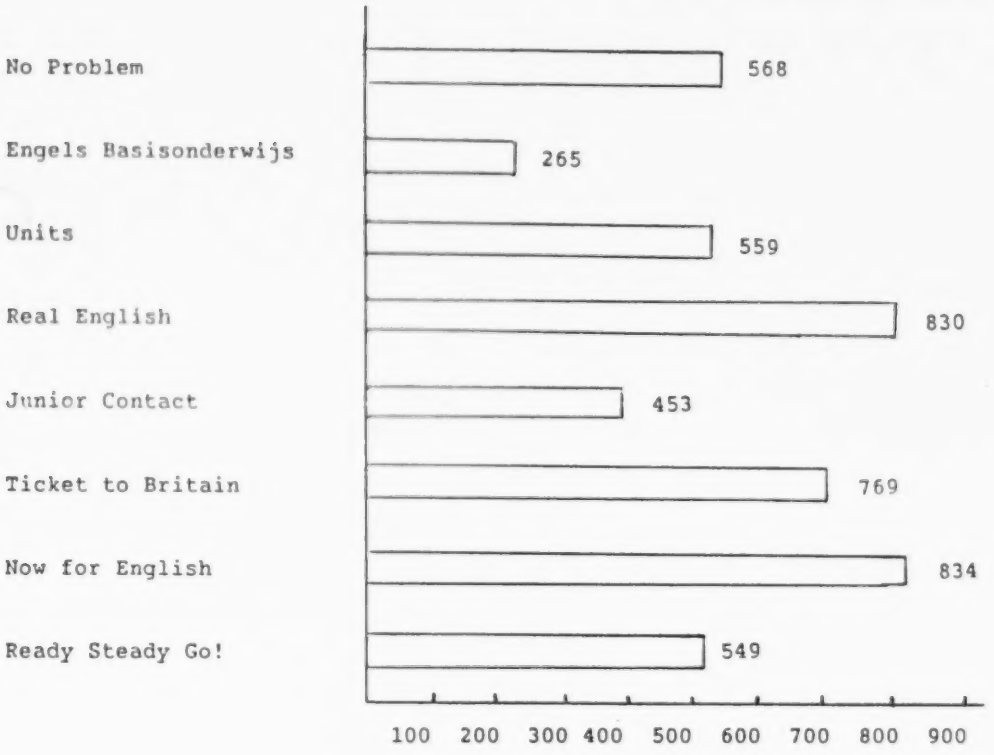
These 23 statements were presented to a number of judges, who were to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 to what extent they agreed with each statement in relation to a certain course for English. The judges proved to be quite consistent in their opinions, and the scale was very homogeneous and reliable. On the basis of their judgments a score was computed for each English course. The higher the score, the more communicative the course is. The mean score for the eight courses is 288.

The three courses which are close to this mean, Real English, Junior Contact, and Ticket to Britain were given the label 'mixed approach', which should be understood as 'communicative in approach, but with a great deal of attention paid to the structural features of English'. The differences between these three and the clearly communicative courses on the one hand, and the clearly grammatical courses on the other, were so conspicuous that we felt we should not force them into either of those two categories so as to preserve the neat dichotomy of 'communicative' versus 'grammatical'. We therefore ended up with three, instead of two, categories.

At the same time we were conducting an extensive analysis of the content of the eight courses. We examined the following points: themes and topics, vocabulary, and the number and nature of the exercises.

As far as themes and topics are concerned, i.e. what the lessons are about, there is hardly any difference between the courses. For example, they all cover: introducing yourself, the family, buying things, colours, clothing, eating and drinking, and parts of the body. This also means that there is much overlap in the vocabulary offered.

Chart 1. Total Number of Exercises in 8 Courses for English in Primary Education



There are great differences between the courses in the total amount of subject matter, and the way this is sub-divided. For the purpose of our study we defined the amount of subject matter in a course as the total number of exercises in that course. In this

context 'exercise' is broadly defined: for example, a class discussion about English words in Dutch usage is also considered an 'exercise'. Most exercises in the courses are nevertheless intended for the pupils to actively practise a language skill.

As you can see in this chart there are great differences in the total number of exercises in the various courses; Engels Basisonderwijs has by far the least number of exercises, only 265, Now for English has most with 834, beating Real English with a margin of just 4.

In order to classify these exercises we had them examined by judges, who were to assign them to one of seven subject matter categories. These categories are:

- listening;
- reading;
- writing;
- speaking;
- grammar;
- language examination;
- games.

The first four of these, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, need no explanation: they are the four basic language skills.

We chose to include 'grammar' as a separate category because the degree of attention paid to grammar is perhaps the most important criterion for determining the approach adopted in a course. An exercise is seen as a 'grammar' exercise when its explicit purpose is the exercising of a grammatical structure or feature. For example, a pattern drill is a typical 'grammar' exercise.

'Language examination' includes things such as the already mentioned class discussion about English words in Dutch usage, the collecting of such words from Dutch newspapers and magazines, discussions of aspects of British or American culture, and so on. 'Games', finally, needs no explanation either.

Table 2. Percentages of Exercises for 7 Subject Matter Categories in 8 English Courses

	listening	reading	writing	speaking	grammar	language ex.	games
No Problem	18	12	13	31	2	20	3
Engels Basisonderw.	20	5	15	38	6	9	6
Units	21	12	19	22	3	18	5
Real English	10	22	13	27	21	5	3
Junior Contact	20	16	10	29	18	3	4
Ticket to Britain	14	6	18	30	30	2	1
Now for English	21	10	9	25	28	1	1
Ready Steady Go!	9	7	10	37	33	4	1
	16	12	13	29	21	7	3

The table shows a number of interesting things. Perhaps the most interesting is that all courses, independent of the approach they adopt, devote the highest percentage of exercises (roughly one quarter to one third of the total) to speaking. There are also marked differences in the percentage of grammar exercises, which to a certain extent correspond with the approach adopted: grammatical courses contain more grammar exercises than communicative courses. The categories 'language examination' and 'games' are most represented in the communicative courses. There are also marked differences between the percentages devoted to listening, reading and writing, but these do not reflect differences in approach.

Although it is interesting to see that there are great differences in content between the courses it is more interesting to determine how much time in class is actually devoted to the various categories. We compiled this information from questions posed to each teacher as to how much time he or she devoted to the various categories.

Table 3. Percentage of Class Time Devoted to Subject Matter Categorie

	listening	reading	writing	speaking	grammar	language ex.	games
No Problem	22	12	8	21	5	9	23
Engels Basisonderwijs	22	13	10	23	8	7	17
Units	19	12	15	26	6	6	15
Real English	18	14	14	21	11	8	14
Junior Contact	21	17	16	25	7	6	10
Ticket to Britain	19	16	15	23	12	6	9
Now for English	17	15	16	24	10	9	10
Ready Steady Go!	26	13	15	20	14	5	7
	20	14	14	23	9	7	14

On the whole speaking is still the most dominant category but listening, reading and writing get much attention, too.

There are only significant differences between the amount of time devoted to grammar and games, as was also the case with the number of exercises for these categories. For the sake of comparison we have brought these figures together in one table (Table 4).

All user groups spend more time on games than could be expected from the percentage of game exercises in the various courses. Apparently this kind of exercise takes up more time than those from other categories, and in most cases teachers tend to prefer them slightly to other kinds of exercises, i.e. they are not often skipped. Nevertheless, more time is devoted to games by teachers using communicative courses than by those using grammatical courses.

Table 4. Percentage of Grammar and Games Exercises in 8 Courses for English in Primary Education and Time Spent in Class on these exercises

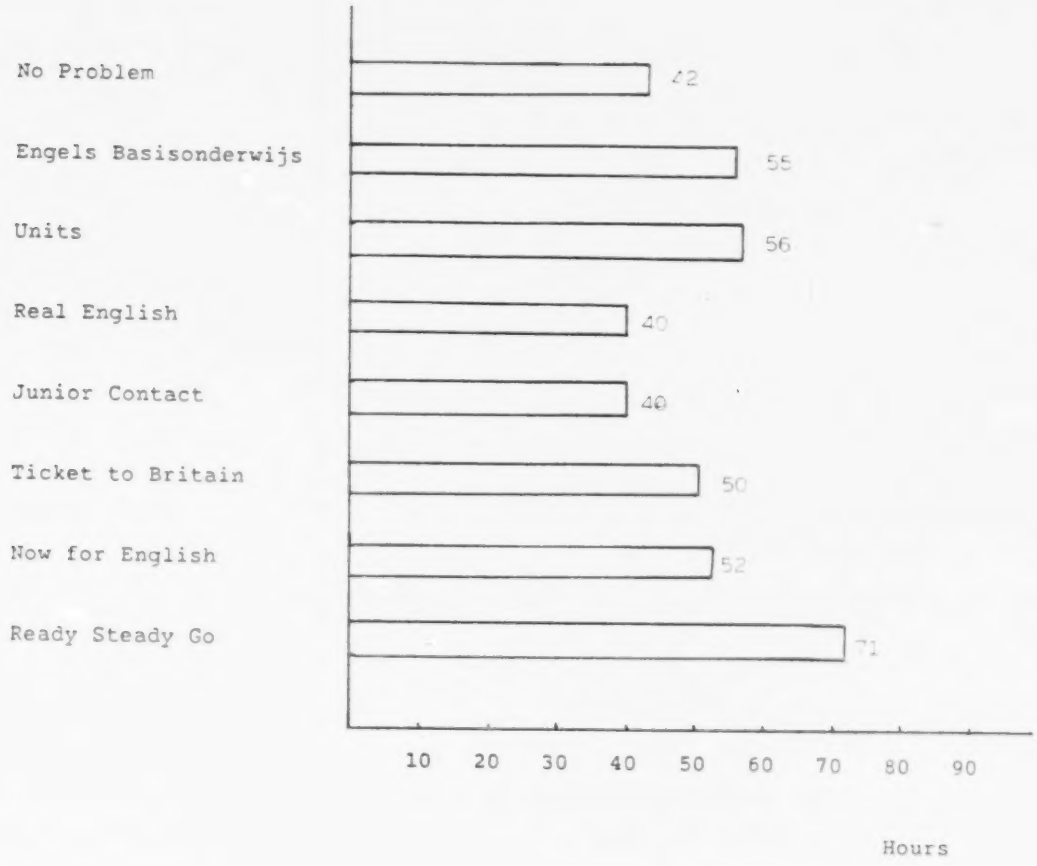
	GRAMMAR		GAMES	
	Percentage in Course	Percentage Lessontime	Percentage in Course	Percentage Lessontime
No Problem	2	5	3	23
Engels Basison.	6	8	6	17
Units	3	6	5	15
Real English	21	11	3	14
Junior Contact	18	7	4	10
Ticket to Brit.	30	12	1	9
Now for English	28	10	1	10
Ready Steady Go!	33	14	1	7

Where Ticket to Britain, one of the 'mixed approach' courses, or Ready Steady Go!, a grammatical course, are used more time is spent on grammar, as is the case with Real English, the other 'mixed approach' courses. The users of communicative courses do not spend that much time on grammar exercises, in keeping with the relatively low percentage of that kind of exercise in their courses.

There are also marked differences between the user groups of the various courses with respect to the total amount of time spent on the teaching of English.

Incidentally, English has a very modest place in the Dutch primary school curriculum: only around 3 per cent of the total lesson time available is devoted to it. But even this small percentage shows considerable variation, as you can see in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Total Amount of Time Spent on English in Primary Education



The chart shows the total amount of time devoted to English in grades 6, 7 and 8. Ready Steady Go! is a clear winner here, which is caused by the fact that it is the only course regularly used in grade 6. The low scores for No Problem, Real English and Junior Contact are caused by the fact that at the time of our study these courses had only very recently been introduced; schools simply had not had the opportunity to work with them for a longer period.

These differences are partly reflected in the percentage of subject matter dealt with in class. None of the various user groups manage to cover the entire course they are working with. Teachers using Engels Basisonderwijs cover 60 per cent of all exercises, those using Real English only 22 percent. Teachers using the communicative courses manage to cover a significantly higher percentage of subject matter. There are two, partly overlapping, explanations for these differences, which I have already mentioned. The first is that some of these courses had only recently been introduced in the schools (in

particular Real English). The other is that some courses (again Real English, and also Now for English) offer a very large number of exercises. It is interesting that the users of No Problem succeed in covering a relatively high percentage (54%) of the subject matter, despite relatively little time devoted to English. Apparently users of communicative courses can 'do' a higher precentage of subject matter in the same amount of time.

On the whole it appeared that, as far as the subject matter to be presented is concerned, the teachers quite faithfully followed the instructions given in the manuals of the courses, i.e. they 'did things by the book', and did not skip many exercises.

We also investigated the way in which they presented the subject matter, i.e. the way in which they actually taught. Here it appeared that especially teachers using communicative courses do not adopt the guidelines presented in the manuals. They instruct their pupils in more or less the same manner as when teaching Dutch or arithmetic. This is partly due to the fact that the manuals do not provide them with detailed principles for interactive teaching, which is nevertheless a requirement for communicative language teaching. This ties in with the findings of Parkinson (1983), that communicative courses on the whole provide few guidelines for communicative teaching, and are hard to implement. This also means that on this point the in-service training, which advocated communicative teaching, did not work.

All the material that I have presented so far (and there is much more which I will not present for lack of time), is necessary for interpreting the results scored by the pupils on the various tests which we administered.

We developed these tests ourselves, in a fairly long process of construction, trail tests, adjustments made on the basis of these trails, and yet more trials. The final result of this development process is a test battery which is both sufficiently reliable, and sufficiently valid.

Pupils should have a certain level of proficiency in each of the four basic language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. We therefore developed tests for these four skills. We also developed two extra tests, one for vocabulary (a necessary prerequisite for all language activities: after all, no language without words), and for grammar.

The content of the various tests is based on analyses of the subject matter and vocabulary in the eight courses for English. For example, a list was drawn up of all the words which were shared by most courses. This 'core vocabulary' was then used to write the tests. A similar list was drawn up of the grammatical features dealt with in the courses, which formed the basis for the grammar test.

I will now show you some examples of the tests we developed, so that you can form some idea about their nature.

In the vocabulary test we worked with pictures. A word was presented, e.g. duck, and the pupils were to choose the correct picture from three alternatives.

a b c

The listening test consisted of short fragments of spoken English, followed by a multiple choice question about each. The questions were of various kinds, here is an example of a true/ false question. The cue is: "Today is the twenty-first of August."

1.

goed = a

fout = b

The reading test tested 'reading for understanding', i.e. the pupils should extract information from a text presented to them. These texts were on the whole short or very short with just one question about each, but there were also some longer texts with more than one question. Here is an example of one of the shorter texts, with the question that goes with it. As you can see, the cue is in Dutch, and the pupils were to fill in a Dutch word. Other questions in this test were of the multiple choice format.

1. Rob is op vakantie in Engeland. Op de deur van een campingwinkel staat dit bordje:

   From 15 April to 15 September:
   closed 12.00 to 14.00 hours

   Dit betekent: Van 15 april tot 15 september

   ..... van 12.00 uur tot 14.00 uur.

The grammar test was a classical multiple choice 'fill in the blank' test, with items such as this one.

16. **Peter is 1 metre 60 centimetres, Jane 1 metre 70 and I'm 1 metre and 95 centimetres! I'm the ..... of us all.**

a. taller
b. tall
c. tallest
d. most tall

For the oral proficiency and writing tests we had the pupils perform a task. Their achievements were then marked by judges, graduate students of English of the University of Groningen. Among other things, they were to count the number of Dutch and English words, the number of grammatical mistakes, and also to give an overall mark for the pupil's achievement.

Most designers of courses for English in primary education do not consider writing to be as important as the other three primary language skills. The writing exercises in the courses make up about 10 to 20 per cent of the total amount of exercises, and most of these consist of simple 'fill-in-the-blank' exercises. Most courses nevertheless do have one or more exercises for writing a simple letter. We therefore had the pupils write a short letter to an imaginary penfriend in Britain. Here are two examples of such letters, the first was considered 'average' by the judges, the second 'good'.

Hello mijn Inlies vrind

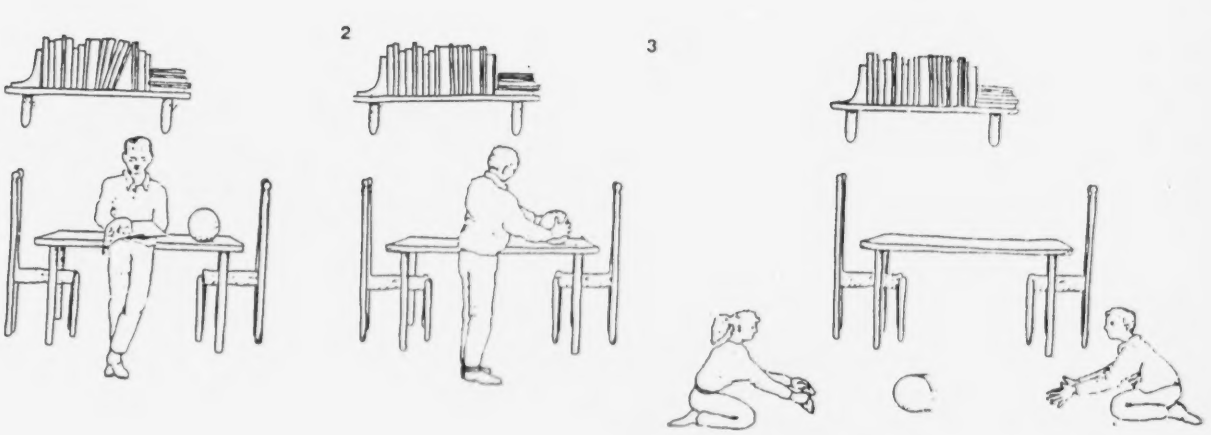
I'm Wilco de Vos en I hef a modder! (moeder) en a vader I to like playing football en playing on mij gitar, i to dislike fight because evrij body most can live in pice (vrede). I en mij familie to like play football. Doe jour familie to on football? I hef a dock en his name Marco. Hef you to animals? Hef a nice day.
bay bay

Dear Carmen

Hello how are you doeing? I'm fine! I have two sisters Jantine she is foarteen jears old aan my little sister her name is joanne she is siks jears old. I have a great motheraand a father. I have to a grandmother and grandfather. I love cow's but ai dont like pigs.
My hobby's are footbal and gymnastik. We have avry saturday football it's great. And we have avery wednesday gymnastik.
Now I stop.
Baye Baye.

Finally, for testing oral proficiency, we had some 5 randomly chosen pupils from each class perform two oral tests. For the first test they had to imagine that they were on holiday in Britain and had to go to the shop to buy some things. They were given a shopping list in Dutch. This kind of situation in which to use the foreign language is present in most of the courses and so most pupils had some experience with it.

For the second oral test they were to describe what they saw on three logically connected pictures.



Most of them had never practised this kind of complex task; we therefore expected it to be much harder for them than the dialogue.

As I said before, the oral proficiency and writing tests were judged on several points, but they were also given an overall mark, according to the marking system used in Dutch schools. This consists of a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest and 10 the highest mark. In words: 1 is "extremely insufficient", 10 "excellent" and 6 "sufficient". Unlike the usual practice in schools, however, we trained our judges to make fine distinctions and to use the whole scale from 1 to 10.

In the following presentation of the pupils' achievements I will use this scale for all tests. The results scored on the multiple choice tests have been transformed to 'fit' this scale. The results will be presented for the whole group of pupils, so not on the level of approach or course. These will be discussed later.

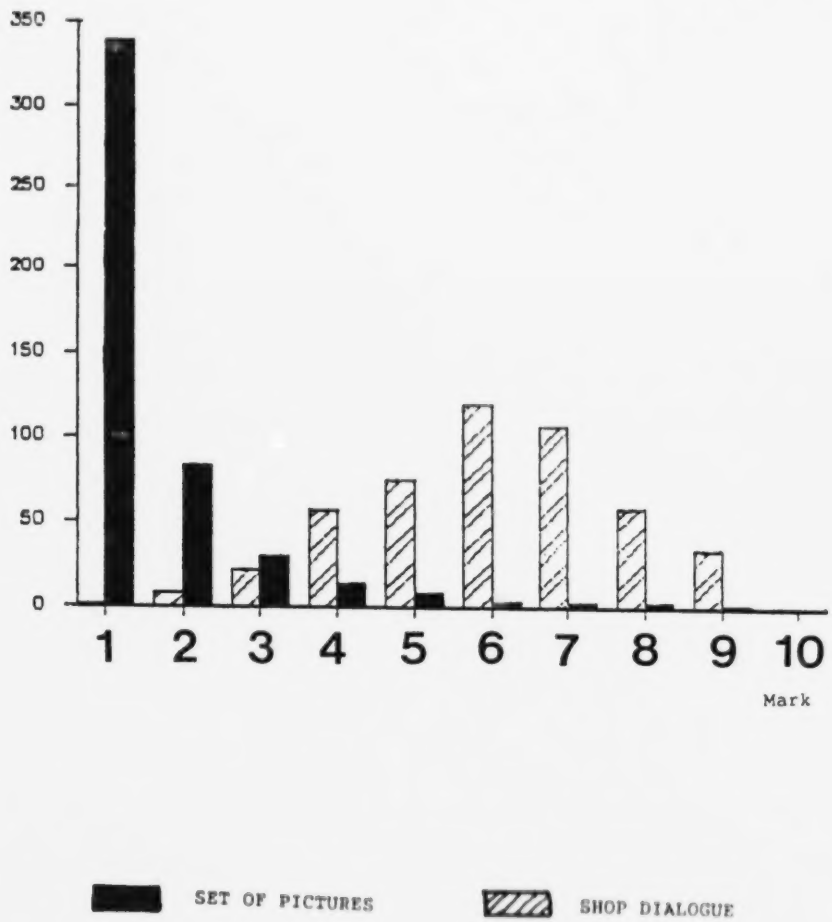
In order to put these results in perspective we asked a panel of experts on English in primary education, consisting of primary school teachers, researchers and teachers of the in-service training, to examine the tests and to indicate a number of things.

The first is the relevance of the tests for measuring the language skills they were supposed to measure. They could do so by marking the test on a scale ranging from 1 (totally irrelevant) to 5 (higly relevant). On the whole the tests were seen as 'fairly relevant' to 'quite relevant'; there was a high degree of conformity among these experts.

The second point was the lowest marks which, in their opinion, still represented a sufficient level of proficiency in the various skills.

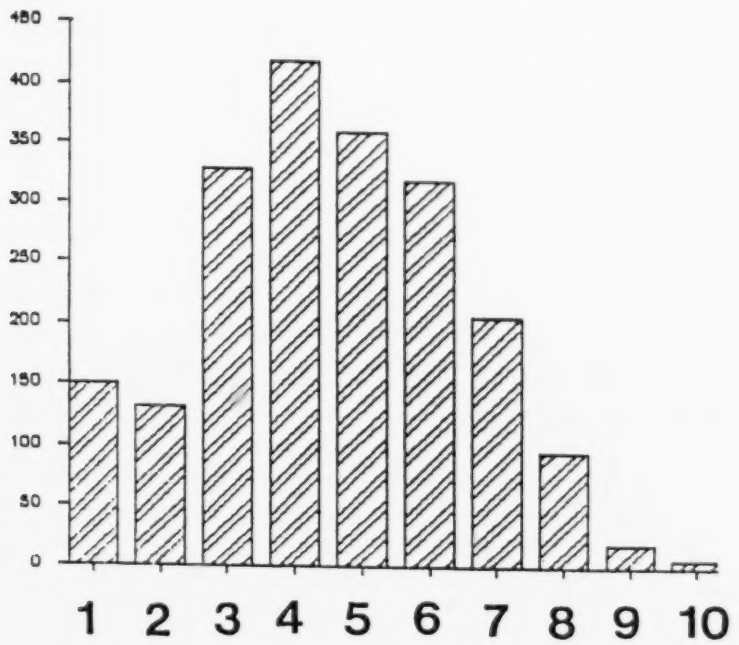
The third was the percentage of all pupils that should score this lowest sufficient mark or a higher one.

Chart 3. Marks for the Oral Proficiency Tests



There is a great difference between the results on the two oral proficiency tests (Chart 3): the relatively simple, and well-known, task of ordering articles in a shop does not present them with too much difficulties, the second, complex and unfamiliar, task proved far too difficult for most of them, as we expected. We therefore decided not to use it any further. According to the panel of experts, the minimum mark for the shop dialogue should be 5.8 and 63 per cent of the pupils should achieve this minimum level. In fact 66 per cent achieved it. The achievement level for oral proficiency can therefore be considered satisfactory for practical speech situations. More abstract tasks prove far too difficult for the average pupil.

Chart 4. Marks for the Writing Test



The required minimum level for the writing test is 5.7 and 54 per cent of the pupils should achieve this level. The actual mean score is only 4.5, and only 16 per cent of the pupils achieved the required minimum mark.

The scores on the listening test are much better.

Listening test

Mean score: 6.9

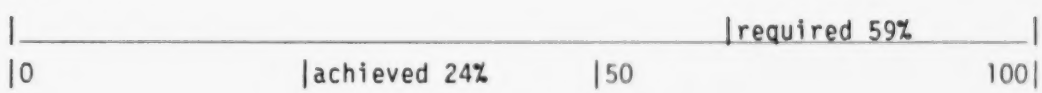
Required minimum: 6.3

The actual mean score is much higher than the required minimum mark and the required percentage is almost reached.

Reading test

Mean score: 5.1

Required minimum: 5.9



The reading test presents a somewhat bleaker picture. It is the least relevant of the tests, according to the panel, although still considered 'fairly relevant'. The required minimum mark and sufficiency percentage are not reached by a long shot. This is probably partly due to the fact that at the end of the test there were some fairly long texts with more than one question about each of them. These proved too difficult for most pupils.

The grammar test also proved difficult. Only just over a quarter of the pupils reached the required minimum mark, and the mean score is more than a point lower than the required minimum mark.

The pupils did well on the vocabulary test, the mean score is half a point higher than the required minimum mark, although the percentage of pupils that actually realized this minimum level is lower than that required by the panel of experts. Still, it is not too bold to state that the passive knowledge of words is satisfactory.

The active use of words, as measured in the writing test and oral proficiency tests, leaves something to be desired, however. The pupils were allowed to use Dutch words if they could not think of English words, and they did so to a large extent. Only about half of the words they used could be judged as being English, but many of these were either misspelt or mispronounced.

So much for the presentation of the pupils' achievements in relation to the minimum standards formulated by the panel of experts. To sum up, it may be stated that on average their passive vocabulary is sufficient, as it their oral proficiency in simple speech situations and their ability to listen for information and read short and relatively simple texts. Their active vocabulary, knowledge of grammar, writing proficiency, and ability to read long texts or perform a complex speech task is insufficient.

The next step is to examine the differences between the groups of pupils using the various courses for English in primary education.

The mean scores on the achievement tests present an interesting picture when broken down with reference to the course used, as you can see in Table 5. As the differences are relatively small we have chosen to present the actual raw scores, so not transformed into a ten points-scale.

The greatest differences occur in the results for the listening and vocabulary tests, and most of all the grammar test. Pupils taught with Ready Steady Go! and Now for English, the two grammatical courses do better on the grammar test than others, especially those taught with Junior Contact. The same goes for the vocabulary test, although Junior Contact does not deviate negatively in this respect.

Table 5. Scores on the Achievements Tests for the 8 Courses for English in Primary Education

Courses	listening	reading	writing	oralproficiency	vocabulary	grammar
No Problem	14	11	4	7	21	13
Engels Basisonderwijs	13	11	5	6	21	12
Units	13	11	4	6	21	13
Real English	12	10	5	6	21	12
Junior Contact	12	10	4	6	21	10
Ticket to Britain	13	10	5	6	21	13
Now for English	14	11	4	6	23	14
Ready Steady Go!	14	12	5	6	24	14
Mean	13	11	5	6	22	13

These scores are not controlled for the socio-economic status of the pupils. After correcting for SES there are still significant differences ($p < .01$) on the three tests mentioned. Pupils taught with the two grammatical courses still do better on the vocabulary and grammar tests than the others. Pupils taught with No Problem, Now for English and Ready Steady Go! do better on the listening test.

This does not mean, however, that the better achievements on these three tests are a direct result of the use of a certain course.

For example, there are great differences in the amount of time devoted to English by the various user groups, as we have already seen. In addition, some teachers (about 1 in 8) have a qualification for teaching English. There are also differences in the teachers' experience in teaching English and their oral proficiency. These factors appear to have a positive relation with the pupils' achievements (after these were corrected for SES).

When these teacher and instructional characteristics are included in the analysis there are still significant differences in the grammar test scores. Pupils taught with grammatical courses do somewhat better on the grammar test, but it is particularly the pupils taught with Junior Contact who score significantly lower.

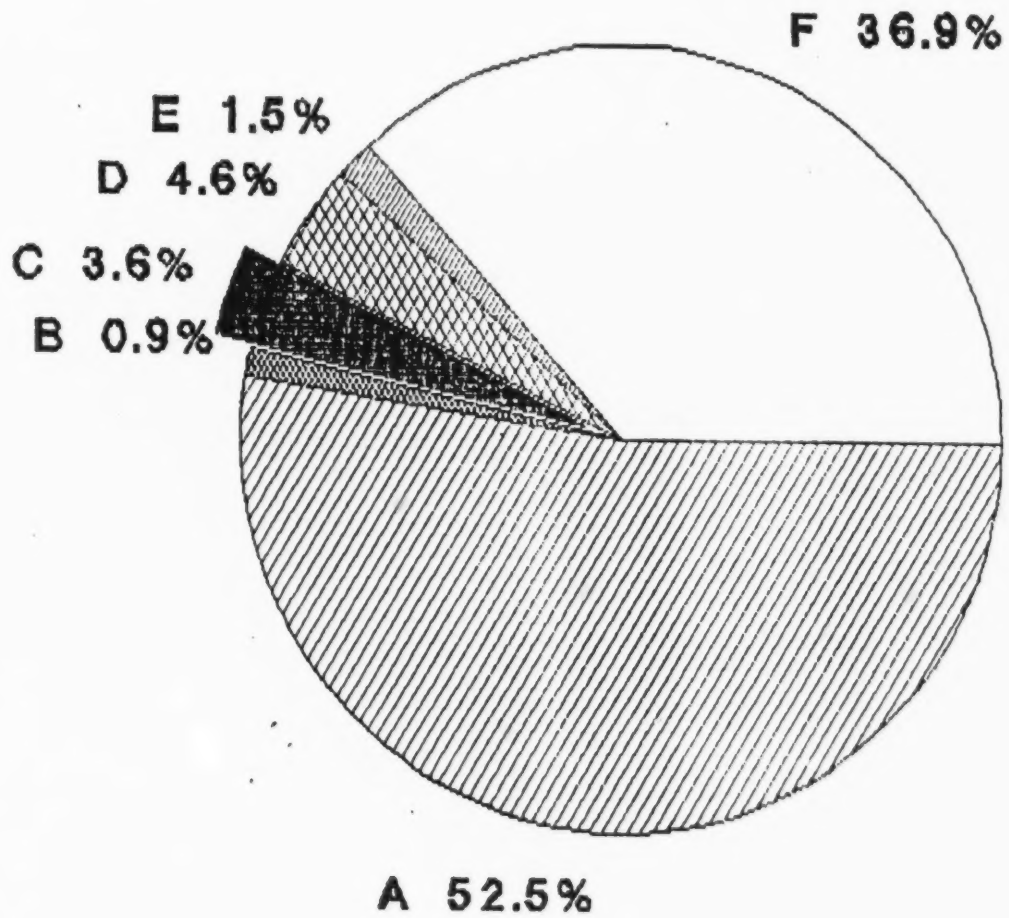
The remaining small differences in oral proficiency, listening, reading and writing proficiency, and vocabulary are not significant and can therefore not be attributed to the use of a certain course for English. In total the course used explains less than 0.5 per cent of the variance in pupils' achievements.

As the course used does not seem to be a very important factor the question arises which factors do influence the pupils' achievements?

By means of a stepwise multiple regression analysis we determined which pupil, teacher, and instruction characteristics influence the pupils' achievements. The results are in Chart 5.

The existing proficiency after one year of learning English --as measured in the pre-test--is by far the most important factor. It explains 52.5 per cent of variance. The two teacher characteristics 'advanced training in English' and 'oral proficiency' explain 6.1 per cent and the time devoted to English another 3.6 per cent. It is interesting that hardly any variance is explained by other pupil characteristics than 'existing proficiency'. This is probably due to the fact that we do not have data on their intelligence.

Chart 5. Percentages of Explained Variance of Pupils' Achievements



A: Pupils' Existing Proficiency in English
B: Pupils' SES
C: Amount of Time spent on English
D: Advanced Training of Teachers
E: Oral Proficiency of Teachers
F: Unexplained Variance

What is the significance of these results for the educational practice? Some tentative conclusions may be drawn, the first of which is that as far as pupil achievement is concerned it does not make a great deal of difference which course for English in primary education is chosen. One piece of advice for teachers could be: chose a course that suits you yourself, i.e. choose a course that corresponds with your own manner of teaching. It would also be advisable to choose a course that is not overburdened with exercises.

The amount of time spent on English does seem to matter: more time invested means better achievements. As many new subjects have recently been added to the curriculum of Dutch primary schools and the time that can be spent on the more traditional subjects such as Dutch language and arithmatic has become less, it seems unlikely that more time will be spent on English. A possible solution could be to start earlier, i.e. in grade 6 instead of grade 7.

The teacher's own proficiency in English and his experience in teaching that subject also have a positive effect on the pupils' achievements. The latter will undoubtedly become higher in future simply because teachers will then have taught English for a number of years, but the former would have to be improved by further training. It is unlikely that the Dutch government will want to spend money for this, so that this will depend on the goodwill of teachers who are, in many cases, already hard-pressed for time.

On the basis of the study we conducted it is not possible to conclude whether English is a worthwhile extension of the primary school curriculum. More experience with the subject is needed for that. And in the end it will undoubtedly be the politicians, not the researchers or the teachers, who will decide whether English is here to stay in Dutch primary schools.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brumfit, Ch.J., and K. Johnson (eds) (1979). The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching. Oxford: OUP.

Edelenbos, P. (1988). Evaluatie Engels in het basisonderwijs. Eindrapport SVO-project 5430. Groningen: RION.

Johnson, K. (1979). Communicative Approaches and Communicative Processes. The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching. Oxford: OUP.

Johnson, K., and D. Porter (1983). Perspectives in Communicative Language Teaching. London: Academic Press.

Parkinson, B (1983). The Evaluation of a 'Communicative' French Course. In: Brumfit, C. (ed). Learning and Teaching Languages for Communication: Applied Linguistic Perspectives. London.

Widdowson, H.G. (1978). Teaching Language as Communication. Oxford: OUP.